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# United States Department of Agriculture,

## BUREAU OF PLANT INDUSTRY,

Seed and Plant Introduction and Distribution,

WASHINGTON, D. C.

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### PARA GRASS (*Panicum barbinode*).

Para grass is a native of South America and is grown somewhat commonly in Florida, to some extent in southern Texas, and occasionally throughout the Gulf coast region. It is a perennial which makes its best growth on damp soils, though it has been fairly successful on Texas ranches on heavy soils without irrigation where irrigation is needed for most other crops. It is not injured by prolonged overflows and makes a vigorous growth where the land is under water several weeks. It is especially valuable for planting on ditch banks, on the margins of ponds, and on soils too wet and seepy for the cultivation of other crops. It is used for both hay and pasture. Para grass will not withstand a lower temperature than about 18° F. It is therefore adapted only to the extreme southern portion of the country and to California. It has succeeded as far north as Charleston, S. C.

*Planting.*—Para grass is usually propagated by planting pieces of the running stems, which often make a growth of 20 to 30 feet in a season. Pieces of the stems from 6 to 12 inches long and having three or four joints grow rapidly when simply pushed down into freshly plowed ground, so propagation is neither difficult nor expensive. The first growth from the cuttings is in long, prostrate runners, but as soon as the ground becomes fairly well covered the plant becomes more erect, soon reaching a height of 3 to 4 feet, so the closer the cuttings are planted the sooner a crop will be secured. When cuttings are scarce and a more abundant supply is wanted for the following season, or when the field is to be used for grazing only, the cuttings may be planted 10 feet apart in each direction, as they will then cover the ground in the course of the summer and afford considerable good grazing, though the amount which can be mowed for hay will be small. When cuttings are abundant and the crop is wanted for hay they should be planted more closely, so that the ground may become covered and the erect growth secured more quickly. If planted only 1 or 2 feet apart in each direction, two or three good cuttings for hay may be made the first season.

*Uses.*—If wanted for hay, Para grass should be cut when it reaches 3 to 4 feet in height. From three to five cuttings may be made in a season; and as from 1 to 3 tons of hay are secured at each cutting, the total yield is heavy. Many Texas and Florida growers report having made as much as 12 tons of hay per acre in a season, and a few report much heavier yields. The hay is rather coarse, but is of excellent quality. When used for pasture the grass stands tramping well and is relished by all kinds of stock.

The yield is greatly increased by annual plowings and diskings. Some growers prefer to plow in November or December, as plowing at that time is sure to cover portions of the stems, so that they will be well protected in case of a freeze, while other cultivators, living below the frost line, prefer to plow in July, sacrificing one midsummer cutting of hay, but loosening the soil, so as to secure heavy August and October cuttings and abundant winter grazing. An annual plowing is certainly beneficial, but the season when it can be done to best advantage seems wholly a matter of the probable winter temperature. While this grass makes very long runners which root at every joint, the runners are wholly above the surface of the ground, and so can be destroyed without great trouble. This grass should be extensively tried under irrigation in Arizona and California. It is one of the very few grasses known that will yield as heavily in gross tonnage as alfalfa. There is reason to believe also that in a dry climate satisfactory seed can be grown.

JANUARY, 1908.



